

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
WESTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI
WESTERN DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Plaintiff,

v.

Case No. 21-00240-01-CR-W-SRB

WARREN W. WATKINS,

Defendant.

PLEA AGREEMENT

Pursuant to Rule 11(c)(1)(B) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, the parties described below have entered into the following plea agreement:

1. The Parties. The parties to this agreement are the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Missouri (otherwise referred to as "the Government" or "the United States"), represented by Teresa A. Moore, United States Attorney, and Kathleen D. Mahoney, Assistant United States Attorney, and the defendant, Warren W. Watkins ("the defendant"), represented by Robert Calbi.

The defendant understands and agrees that this plea agreement is only between him and the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, and that it does not bind any other federal, state, or local prosecution authority or any other government agency, unless otherwise specified in this agreement.

2. Defendant's Guilty Plea. The defendant agrees to and hereby does plead guilty to Count One of the Indictment charging him with a violation of 18 U.S.C. § 286, that is, Conspiracy to Defraud the Government. By entering into this plea agreement, the defendant admits that he knowingly committed this offense, and is in fact guilty of this offense.

3. Factual Basis for Guilty Plea. The parties agree that the facts constituting the offense to which he is pleading guilty are as follows:

The United States Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act on March 25, 2020, and the President signed it into law March 27, 2020. The CARES Act implemented a variety of programs to provide fast and direct economic assistance to American workers, families, small businesses, and industries to lessen the effects of the Coronavirus pandemic. One of those programs provided for initial “economic impact payments” to qualifying United States citizens and legal residents in the amount of \$1,200 per person, or \$2,400 per married couple.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) administered the economic impact payments using the IRS database. For individuals who did not meet the tax filing threshold income and thus did not file federal income tax returns, the IRS provided a web portal for individuals to make a claim and provide information for payment processing. Individuals could elect to have the payment electronically deposited into their bank account, deposited onto a debit card, or sent to them in the form of a United States Treasury check.

Warren WATKINS, Marissia JACKSON, and Lamar JOHNSON used the identities of other people to file a total of 238 false and fraudulent economic impact payment claims seeking a total of \$285,600. Most of the individuals whose identities the defendants used were deceased. Defendants also filed at least 28 false and fraudulent federal income tax returns in the names of other individuals seeking a total of \$152,155 in income tax credits and refunds. The total attempted loss from both schemes was \$437,755. The IRS paid \$4,800 of the claims.

Defendants used computers with internet protocol (IP) addresses based in Kansas City, Missouri, to file the false and fraudulent claims for economic impact payments and tax refunds. 206 of the claims were filed from an IP address assigned to a Charter Communications account of Marissia JACKSON.

In the spring of 2020, Warren WATKINS, Marissia JACKSON, and Lamar K. JOHNSON lived at the same address in Kansas City, Missouri. Marissia JACKSON’s Charter Communications account and IP address used to file false claims were registered to this same residence.

Defendant Warren WATKINS was associated with two Kansas City, Missouri funeral homes. 226 of the individuals whose identities were used to file the false claims had received funeral services from the two funeral homes or a third associated funeral home. The individuals whose identities were stolen are identified in this indictment by their initials.

Defendants established bank accounts and used prepaid debit card accounts. WATKINS had three accounts at Bank of America, account numbers ending 4608, 4884, and 4897. WATKINS had one account at Sutton Bank, an issuer of prepaid debit cards for Square Cash App, account number ending 9827. JACKSON had an account at Republic Bank & Trust, an issuer of Netspend debit cards, account number ending 3587. She had an account at Sutton Bank, an issuer of prepaid debit cards for Square Cash App, account listed as

“Jackson Marissia,” account number ending 2923. JOHNSON had an account at Sutton Bank, an issuer of prepaid debit cards for Square Cash App, account number ending 4376.

Defendants directed 159 of the economic impact payments to be electronically deposited into their bank accounts and debit card accounts.

Defendants directed approximately 109 of the economic impact payments to be sent in the form of a United States Treasury check to Kansas City, Missouri, addresses. Many of those addresses were associated with defendants.

Defendants created approximately 29 email accounts and associated email addresses using the IP account and address registered to JACKSON. Defendants used these email addresses in the filing of approximately 206 false and fraudulent claims.

COUNT ONE

Beginning in or about March 28, 2020, and continuing until in or about April 15, 2021, in the Western District of Missouri, and elsewhere, defendants Warren W. WATKINS, Marissia JACKSON, and Lamar K. JOHNSON, knowingly and willfully entered into an agreement and conspiracy to defraud the United States by obtaining and attempting to obtain the payment of false, fictitious, and fraudulent claims on behalf of themselves and others by using the identities of other individuals to submit false claims for economic impact payments to the United States Department of Treasury through the Internal Revenue Service.

4. Use of Factual Admissions and Relevant Conduct. The defendant acknowledges, understands and agrees that the admissions contained in Paragraph 3 and other portions of this plea agreement will be used for the purpose of determining his guilt and advisory sentencing range under the United States Sentencing Guidelines (“U.S.S.G.”), including the calculation of the defendant’s offense level in accordance with U.S.S.G. § 1B1.3(a)(2). The defendant acknowledges, understands and agrees that the conduct charged in any dismissed counts of the indictment as well as all other uncharged related criminal activity may be considered as “relevant conduct” pursuant to U.S.S.G. § 1B1.3(a)(2) in calculating the offense level for the charges to which he is pleading guilty.

5. Statutory Penalties. The defendant understands that upon his plea of guilty to Count One of the Indictment charging him with Conspiracy to Defraud the Government, the maximum penalty the Court may impose is not more than ten years of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, three years of supervised release, a \$100 mandatory special assessment, and an order of restitution. This offense is a Class C felony.

6. Sentencing Procedures. The defendant acknowledges, understands and agrees to the following:

a. in determining the appropriate sentence, the Court will consult and consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines promulgated by the United States Sentencing Commission; these Guidelines, however, are advisory in nature, and the Court may impose a sentence either less than or greater than the defendant's applicable Guidelines range, unless the sentence imposed is "unreasonable";

b. the Court will determine the defendant's applicable Sentencing Guidelines range at the time of sentencing;

c. in addition to a sentence of imprisonment, the Court may impose a term of supervised release of up to three years; that the Court must impose a period of supervised release if a sentence of imprisonment of more than one year is imposed;

d. if the defendant violates a condition of his supervised release, the Court may revoke his supervised release and impose an additional period of imprisonment of up to two years without credit for time previously spent on supervised release. In addition to a new term of imprisonment, the Court also may impose a new period of supervised release, the length of which cannot exceed three years, less the term of imprisonment imposed upon revocation of the defendant's first supervised release;

e. the Court may impose any sentence authorized by law, including a sentence that is outside of, or departs from, the applicable Sentencing Guidelines range;

f. any sentence of imprisonment imposed by the Court will not allow for parole;

g. the Court is not bound by any recommendation regarding the sentence to be imposed or by any calculation or estimation of the Sentencing Guidelines range offered by the parties or the United States Probation Office; and

h. the defendant may not withdraw his guilty plea solely because of the nature or length of the sentence imposed by the Court.

i. Within 10 days of the execution of this plea agreement, at the request of the USAO, the defendant agrees to execute and submit: (1) a Tax Information Authorization form; (2) an Authorization to Release Information; (3) a completed financial disclosure statement; and (4) copies of financial information that the defendant submits to the U.S. Probation Office. The defendant understands that the United States will use the financial information when making its recommendation to the Court regarding the defendant's acceptance of responsibility.

7. Government's Agreements. Based upon evidence in its possession at this time, the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Missouri, as part of this plea agreement, agrees not to bring any additional charges against defendant for any federal criminal offenses related to the indictment for which it has venue and which arose out of the defendant's conduct described above. Additionally, the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri agrees to dismiss Counts Two – Thirty-Seven of the Indictment at sentencing.

The defendant understands that this plea agreement does not foreclose any prosecution for an act of murder or attempted murder, an act or attempted act of physical or sexual violence against the person of another, or a conspiracy to commit any such acts of violence or any criminal activity of which the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri has no knowledge.

The defendant recognizes that the United States' agreement to forego prosecution of all of the criminal offenses with which the defendant might be charged is based solely on the promises made by the defendant in this agreement. If the defendant breaches this plea agreement, the United States retains the right to proceed with the original charges and any other criminal violations established by the evidence. The defendant expressly waives his right to challenge the initiation of the dismissed or additional charges against him if he breaches this agreement. The defendant expressly waives his right to assert a statute of limitations defense if the dismissed or additional

charges are initiated against him following a breach of this agreement. The defendant further understands and agrees that if the Government elects to file additional charges against him following his breach of this plea agreement, he will not be allowed to withdraw his guilty plea.

8. Preparation of Presentence Report. The defendant understands the United States will provide to the Court and the United States Probation Office a government version of the offense conduct. This may include information concerning the background, character, and conduct of the defendant, including the entirety of his criminal activities. The defendant understands these disclosures are not limited to the counts to which he has pleaded guilty. The United States may respond to comments made or positions taken by the defendant or the defendant's counsel and to correct any misstatements or inaccuracies. The United States further reserves its right to make any recommendations it deems appropriate regarding the disposition of this case, subject only to any limitations set forth in this plea agreement. The United States and the defendant expressly reserve the right to speak to the Court at the time of sentencing pursuant to Rule 32(i)(4) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure.

9. Withdrawal of Plea. Either party reserves the right to withdraw from this plea agreement for any or no reason at any time prior to the entry of the defendant's plea of guilty and its formal acceptance by the Court. In the event of such withdrawal, the parties will be restored to their pre-plea agreement positions to the fullest extent possible. However, after the plea has been formally accepted by the Court, the defendant may withdraw his plea of guilty only if the Court rejects the plea agreement or if the defendant can show a fair and just reason for requesting the withdrawal. The defendant understands that if the Court accepts his plea of guilty and this plea agreement but subsequently imposes a sentence that is outside the defendant's applicable

Sentencing Guidelines range, or imposes a sentence that the defendant does not expect, like or agree with, he will not be permitted to withdraw his plea of guilty.

10. Agreed Guidelines Applications. With respect to the application of the Sentencing Guidelines to this case, the parties stipulate and agree as follows:

a. The Sentencing Guidelines do not bind the Court and are advisory in nature. The Court may impose a sentence that is either above or below the defendant's applicable Guidelines range, provided the sentence imposed is not "unreasonable";

b. The parties agree the base offense level for Count One is 18 based upon an attempt loss of \$250,000 - \$550,000. The parties may argue whether a two-level enhancement for role in the offense applies pursuant to § 3B1.1. Either party may argue for any other applicable enhancement or reduction;

c. Either party may request a departure or variance from the advisory Sentencing Guidelines range;

d. The defendant has admitted his guilt and clearly accepted responsibility for his actions, and has assisted authorities in the investigation or prosecution of his own misconduct by timely notifying authorities of his intention to enter a plea of guilty, thereby permitting the Government to avoid preparing for trial and permitting the Government and the Court to allocate their resources efficiently. Therefore, he is entitled to a three-level reduction pursuant to § 3E1.1(b) of the Sentencing Guidelines, unless the defendant (1) fails to abide by all of the terms and conditions of this plea agreement and his pretrial release; or (2) attempts to withdraw his guilty plea, violates the law, or otherwise engages in conduct inconsistent with his acceptance of responsibility;

e. The parties agree that the Court will determine his applicable criminal history category after receipt of the presentence investigation report prepared by the United States Probation Office;

f. The defendant understands that the estimate of the parties with respect to the Guidelines computation set forth in the subsections of this paragraph does not bind the Court or the United States Probation Office with respect to the appropriate Guidelines levels. Additionally, the failure of the Court to accept these stipulations will not, as outlined in Paragraph 9 of this plea agreement, provide the defendant with a basis to withdraw his plea of guilty;

g. The defendant consents to judicial fact-finding by a preponderance of the evidence for all issues pertaining to the determination of the defendant's

sentence, including the determination of any mandatory minimum sentence (including the facts that support any specific offense characteristic or other enhancement or adjustment), and any legally authorized increase above the normal statutory maximum. The defendant waives any right to a jury determination beyond a reasonable doubt of all facts used to determine and enhance the sentence imposed, and waives any right to have those facts alleged in the superseding indictment. The defendant also agrees that the Court, in finding the facts relevant to the imposition of sentence, may consider any reliable information, including hearsay;

h. The defendant understands and agrees that the factual admissions contained in Paragraph 3 of this plea agreement, and any admissions that he will make during his plea colloquy, support the imposition of the agreed-upon Guidelines calculations contained in this agreement;

i. The United States agrees that defendant may remain on bond pending sentencing assuming he is in compliance with the terms of pre-trial supervision.

11. Effect of Non-Agreement on Guidelines Applications. The parties understand, acknowledge and agree that there are no agreements between the parties with respect to any Sentencing Guidelines issues other than those specifically listed in Paragraph 10, and its subsections. As to any other Guidelines issues, the parties are free to advocate their respective positions at the sentencing hearing.

12. Change in Guidelines Prior to Sentencing. The defendant agrees that if any applicable provision of the Guidelines changes after the execution of this plea agreement, then any request by defendant to be sentenced pursuant to the new Guidelines will make this plea agreement voidable by the United States at its option. If the Government exercises its option to void the plea agreement, the United States may charge, reinstate, or otherwise pursue any and all criminal charges that could have been brought but for this plea agreement.

13. Government's Reservation of Rights. The defendant understands that the United States expressly reserves the right in this case to:

a. oppose or take issue with any position advanced by defendant at the sentencing hearing which might be inconsistent with the provisions of this plea agreement;

b. comment on the evidence supporting the charges in the indictment;

c. oppose any arguments and requests for relief the defendant might advance on an appeal from the sentences imposed and that the United States remains free on appeal or collateral proceedings to defend the legality and propriety of the sentence actually imposed, even if the Court chooses not to follow any recommendation made by the United States; and

d. oppose any post-conviction motions for reduction of sentence, or other relief.

14. Waiver of Constitutional Rights. The defendant, by pleading guilty, acknowledges that he has been advised of, understands, and knowingly and voluntarily waives the following rights:

a. the right to plead not guilty and to persist in a plea of not guilty;

b. the right to be presumed innocent until his guilt has been established beyond a reasonable doubt at trial;

c. the right to a jury trial, and at that trial, the right to the effective assistance of counsel;

d. the right to confront and cross-examine the witnesses who testify against him;

e. the right to compel or subpoena witnesses to appear on his behalf; and

f. the right to remain silent at trial, in which case his silence may not be used against him.

The defendant understands that by pleading guilty, he waives or gives up those rights and that there will be no trial. The defendant further understands that if he pleads guilty, the Court may ask him questions about the offense to which he pleaded guilty, and if the defendant answers those questions under oath and in the presence of counsel, his answers may later be used against

him in a prosecution for perjury or making a false statement. The defendant also understands he has pleaded guilty to a felony offense and, as a result, will lose his right to possess a firearm or ammunition and might be deprived of other rights, such as the right to vote or register to vote, hold public office, or serve on a jury.

15. Waiver of Appellate and Post-Conviction Rights.

a. The defendant acknowledges, understands and agrees that by pleading guilty pursuant to this plea agreement he waives his right to appeal or collaterally attack a finding of guilt following the acceptance of this plea agreement, except on grounds of (1) ineffective assistance of counsel; or (2) prosecutorial misconduct.

b. The defendant expressly waives his right to appeal his sentence, directly or collaterally, on any ground except claims of (1) ineffective assistance of counsel; (2) prosecutorial misconduct; or (3) an illegal sentence. An “illegal sentence” includes a sentence imposed in excess of the statutory maximum, but does *not* include less serious sentencing errors, such as a misapplication of the Sentencing Guidelines, an abuse of discretion, or the imposition of an unreasonable sentence. However, if the United States exercises its right to appeal the sentence imposed as authorized by 18 U.S.C. § 3742(b), the defendant is released from this waiver and may, as part of the Government’s appeal, cross-appeal his sentence as authorized by 18 U.S.C. § 3742(a) with respect to any issues that have not been stipulated to or agreed upon in this agreement.

16. Financial Obligations. By entering into this plea agreement, the defendant represents that he understands and agrees to the following financial obligations:

a. The Court must order restitution.

b. Defendant agrees that restitution is due and payable immediately after the judgment is entered and is subject to immediate enforcement, in full, by the United States. If the Court imposes a schedule of payments, Defendant agrees that the schedule of payments is a schedule of the minimum payment due, and that the payment schedule does not prohibit or limit the methods by which the United States may immediately enforce the judgment in full.

c. If Defendant makes a payment of the restitution prior to sentencing, the payment will be applied as a credit against the restitution ordered.

d. The United States may use the Federal Debt Collection Procedures Act and any other remedies provided by law to enforce any restitution order that may be entered as part of the sentence in this case and to collect any fine.

e. With each payment to the Clerk of the Court made pursuant to the District Court's restitution order, defendant will provide the following information:

1. Defendant's name and Social Security number;
2. The District Court docket number assigned to this case; and
3. A statement that the payment is being submitted pursuant to the District Court's restitution order.

f. The defendant hereby authorizes the USAO to obtain a credit report pertaining to him to assist the USAO in evaluating the defendant's ability to satisfy any financial obligations imposed as part of the sentence.

g. The defendant understands that a Special Assessment will be imposed as part of the sentence in this case. The defendant promises to pay the Special Assessment of \$100 by submitting a satisfactory form of payment to the Clerk of the Court prior to appearing for the sentencing proceeding in this case. The defendant agrees to provide the Clerk's receipt as evidence of his fulfillment of this obligation at the time of sentencing.

h. The defendant certifies that he has made no transfer of assets or property for the purpose of (1) evading financial obligations created by this Agreement; (2) evading obligations that may be imposed by the Court; nor (3) hindering efforts of the USAO to enforce such financial obligations. Moreover, the defendant promises that he will make no such transfers in the future.

i. In the event the United States learns of any misrepresentation in the financial disclosure statement, or of any asset in which the defendant had an interest at the time of this plea agreement that is not disclosed in the financial disclosure statement, and in the event such misrepresentation or nondisclosure changes the estimated net worth of the defendant by ten thousand dollars or more, the United States may at its option: (1) choose to be relieved of its obligations under this plea agreement; or (2) let the plea agreement stand, collect the full forfeiture, restitution, and fines imposed by any criminal or civil judgment, and also collect 100% of the value of any previously undisclosed assets. The defendant agrees not to contest any collection of such assets. In the event the United States opts to be relieved of its obligations under this plea agreement, the defendant's previously entered pleas of guilty shall remain in effect and cannot be withdrawn.

17. Waiver of FOIA Request. The defendant waives all of his rights, whether asserted

directly or by a representative, to request or receive, or to authorize any third party to request or receive, from any department of the United States any records pertaining to the investigation or prosecution of this case including, without limitation, any records that may be sought under the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552, or the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a.

18. Waiver of Claim for Attorney's Fees. The defendant waives all of his claims under the Hyde Amendment, 18 U.S.C. § 3006A, for attorney's fees and other litigation expenses arising out of the investigation or prosecution of this matter.

19. Defendant's Breach of Plea Agreement. If the defendant commits any crimes, violates any conditions of release, or violates any term of this plea agreement between the signing of this plea agreement and the date of sentencing, or fails to appear for sentencing, or if the defendant provides information to the Probation Office or the Court that is intentionally misleading, incomplete, or untruthful, or otherwise breaches this plea agreement, the United States will be released from its obligations under this agreement. The defendant, however, will remain bound by the terms of the agreement, and will not be allowed to withdraw his plea of guilty.

The defendant also understands and agrees that in the event he violates this plea agreement, all statements made by him to law enforcement agents subsequent to the execution of this plea agreement, any testimony given by him before a grand jury or any tribunal or any leads from such statements or testimony shall be admissible against him in any and all criminal proceedings. The defendant waives any rights that he might assert under the United States Constitution, any statute, Rule 11(f) of the Federal Rules of Criminal Procedure, Rule 410 of the Federal Rules of Evidence, or any other federal rule that pertains to the admissibility of any statements made by him subsequent to this plea agreement.

20. Defendant's Representations. The defendant acknowledges that he has entered into

this plea agreement freely and voluntarily after receiving the effective assistance, advice and approval of counsel. The defendant acknowledges that he is satisfied with the assistance of counsel, and that counsel has fully advised him of his rights and obligations in connection with this plea agreement. The defendant further acknowledges that no threats or promises, other than the promises contained in this plea agreement, have been made by the United States, the Court, his attorneys or any other party to induce him to enter his plea of guilty.

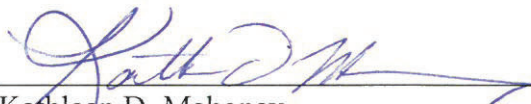
21. No Undisclosed Terms. The United States and defendant acknowledge and agree that the above-stated terms and conditions, together with any written supplemental agreement that might be presented to the Court in camera, constitute the entire plea agreement between the parties, and that any other terms and conditions not expressly set forth in this agreement or any written supplemental agreement do not constitute any part of the parties' agreement and will not be enforceable against either party.

22. Standard of Interpretation. The parties agree that, unless the constitutional implications inherent in plea agreements require otherwise, this plea agreement should be interpreted according to general contract principles and the words employed are to be given their normal and ordinary meanings. The parties further agree that, in interpreting this agreement, any drafting errors or ambiguities are not to be automatically construed against either party, whether or not that party was involved in drafting or modifying this agreement.

Teresa A. Moore
United States Attorney

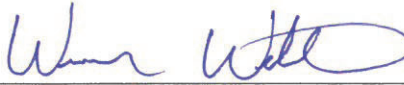
Dated: _____

March 3, 2022


Kathleen D. Mahoney
Assistant United States Attorney

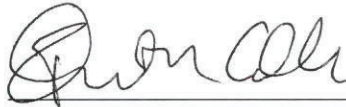
I have consulted with my attorney and fully understand all of my rights with respect to the offenses charged in the indictment. Further, I have consulted with my attorney and fully understand my rights with respect to the provisions of the Sentencing Guidelines. I have read this plea agreement and carefully reviewed every part of it with my attorney. I understand this plea agreement and I voluntarily agree to it.

Dated: 3-17-22


Warren W. Watkins
Defendant

I am defendant Warren W. Watkins's attorney. I have fully explained to him his rights with respect to the offenses charged in the indictment. Further, I have reviewed with him the provisions of the Sentencing Guidelines which might apply in this case. I have carefully reviewed every part of this plea agreement with him. To my knowledge, Warren W. Watkins's decision to enter into this plea agreement is an informed and voluntary one.

Dated: 3-17-22


Robert Calbi
Attorney for Defendant